

Interview by Elena Vladimirova, Moskovskie novosti, 7.09.1999

ALEXANDER MORFOV:

THE DIRECTOR IS ALSO A DON QUIXOTE



A few years ago you staged “Don Quixote” at your National Theatre [Bulgaria]. Why did you decide to turn again towards Cervantes’ novel?

I read “Don Quixote” for the first time back in my school years. After that I’ve returned to it many times and each time there was something new to find. I can compare this novel to a file that is saved and is waiting for you to open it once again. Of course, I might be wrong for certain things, but I’m honest. The director is also a Don Quixote.

What is the main idea found in your production?

I’ve been long interested in mythological personalities. For instance we know that if there’s a smiling person with moustache, it’s Einstein. We know his connection to the theory of relativity but we never think about what he actually did, what is his place in the world of physics, in the world as a whole. I’m trying to oppose such superficial concepts. We are used to the image of Don Quixote as a tall, thin man, somewhat crazy, a little aged, who thinks of himself as of a knight-errant. I find Don Quixote a normal person, wise and very dignified. He has come a far way to realise that there is nothing more important in this world than dignity. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are the same person. Everyone who was once born as Sancho Panza must evolve to a Don Quixote and vice versa because the world keeps shaking. Beckett was quite right saying “Waiting for Godot” that for each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops.

Why did you decide to stage your “Don Quixote” at the *Et Cetera* Theatre?

I had just seen for yet another time Nikita Mikhalkov’s film “An Unfinished Piece for the Player Piano” and thought that Alexander Kalyagin is man who can embody my Don Quixote. Then I had a lucky meeting with the producer David Smelyansky who presented me to Kalyagin. He loved the idea. He said that he was

offered the role of Sancho Panza a thousand times but he had always refused because it's the more superficial one. This is how my destiny brought me to the *Et Cetera* Theatre.

The set design and the costumes for your production are created by one of the most distinguished theatre artists Edward Kochergin. What are your relations?

I'm afraid of the classic. They remind me of a marble statue impossible to argue with, and that's why I was afraid of meeting with a monument such as Kochergin. But it turned out that there is not a hint of academism in him. I was stunned to see a man of this height who had preserved his ability for instant improvisation. I don't know what the production will prove to be but can say with certainty that what he did is beautiful.

Is there a difference between the Bulgarian and Russian theatre school?

In Russia the school of psychological realism is at a higher level compared with Bulgaria. It's true that very often it is just an imitation but Russian actors are better at imitating authentic psychologism than Bulgarian actors. On the other hand, the strive for play in Bulgarian actors is very often empty. I'm trying to provoke in the Russian actors their playing nature and then charge the act with a tragic psychologism.

You have staged Shakespeare and Boccaccio, Cervantes and Gorky, and quite rarely any contemporary playwrights. Why do you prefer classics?

Modernity is not a favourite period of mine. In present days art is turning into a burden. I don't want to be a part of that. I don't want to dig in the garbage. I don't find it interesting staging shows about the homeless, I'd better find problems that inspire me within the classical works. But I have staged also some contemporary playwrights. Ten years ago in a small province town [Smolyan, Bulgaria] I staged "Political Cabaret" where I used excerpts from Brecht, Zhvanetsky, other contemporary authors and also my texts. But we immediately drew attention and we were thrown out of this theatre because of that production. When democracy came we held a show in Sofia as well as in other cities. It became the flag of the new democracy. Eight years ago I finally staged a somewhat insane and strange reminiscence based on texts by Beckett, Mrozek and Ionesco. It was a funny and tragic production. Now I'm working on a new version – out of any time or nationality. If we travel somewhere we would include an actor or two from the host country.

Do you like watching your shows?

It's painful every time. It's always different from what I have expected. Before the show begins, be it its hundredth performance, I always hold a rehearsal. It's the only way to preserve the freshness of the relation with the director.

Is the audience important to you?

Of course, it is. Theatre exists because of the audience. There is something sacred about the audience. I think that the church is unable to change anyone but when you enter the theatre hall and start praying, then you feel closer to God. I wish that people could feel the same way, entering the hall.